**Creating a Coaching Handbook**

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**Rationale**

We have a very strong athletic department in Clayton with many things to be proud of. We have had three different athletic directors since I have been coaching in Clayton. Our coaching staff has been very consistent, but we are getting older. We are in a position to start thinking about new, young coaches in our district. I asked our current athletic director what we have for new coaches coming into our district. There are many things to know such as: responsibilities, clinics, apparel, transportation, sportsmanship, budgets, requirements, parent meetings, etc. We have a very giving and mentoring group of coaches in our district and that is how I learned. The difference is that I had known most of the coaches prior to me becoming a head coach in Clayton myself. I felt very comfortable asking those questions that new coaches might feel dumb asking. Our athletic director told me we did not have anything like that in our district, but it was on his to-do list. When I mentioned that I would like to create something like that for one of my projects, he was very excited.

There are so many things that a new head coach has to know outside of the X’s and O’s. With all the lawsuits, concussion, firings, and social media issues out there it is very important we guide and teach our new coaches just like we would a new teacher. A school district is ultimately responsible for all the people who work in their district. I believe creating a coaching handbook for new coaches would be a very helpful tool for new coaches hired into our district. It is also a wise decision for school districts to have something like this on many levels. It would help a new coach make proper decisions, it would cover the school district if they did have to fire a coach, it would be helpful in a lawsuit to help cover a school district, and in the end it would help maintain the same base philosophies among all coaches. The more the staff, administration, and school board are on the same page the better the chance of success.

**Competencies Met**

It is vital to explain to coaches the importance of positive relationships and collaboration between coaches on staff, other coaches in the building, and administration. **(Leadership 1-leadership styles & School Community Relations 5-development of interpersonal relationships)** Head coaches need to develop a vision for their program and have their players and parents buy into that vision. Parents will usually buy into the vision if they feel their child is being treated fairly, are safe, and are having fun. Players will buy in if they are having fun and if they have success. A head coach needs to be able to plan both short and long term and be able to effectively communicate that vision in the matter that fits the situation. A head coach also needs to maintain a safe, efficient, and positive atmosphere in their athletic program. If a coach can do these things and communicate effectively, support will be gained. **(Leadership 2-develop focus, 5-long range planning, 6-itegrity, fair, ethical, 7-effective communication & Facilities 3-operations, 4-health and safety, 6-impact of learning)**

An important aspect of being an effective coach is having the ability to make a proper decision in a given situation. When it comes to making decisions off of the field or court, it is important to have things on paper. Rules, expectations, punishments, etc are all examples of things that need to be documented by a coach. If those things are put on paper and made available to players and parents, many issues can proactively be resolved. Decisions are based on coaching theories and philosophies, but should also go hand-in-hand with school-wide policy. **(Decision Making 1-theories and processes)** When building a coaching handbook, expectations must be related to both school rules and the WIAA rules for play. It is important that the athletic director and coaches are knowledgeable about these particular expectations when building their athletic program philosophies. Coaches are liable to keep their players safe by following all the rules to the letter and making sure players and parents are informed of these rules. **(Decision Making 1-theories and processes, 2-roles of power & School Law 1-legal rights, 5-legal issues, 6-teacher liability)**

Before games and during games, a different kind of decision-making needs to be done. These decisions are based on what your team needs and what the circumstances of the game are. Decisions are made on what your team has practiced and what adjustments they are used to making. Coaches must be able to great evaluators, predictors, and planners. You can predict what someone might do against you, plan accordingly, but then when things do not happen as planned one must be able to evaluate the best way to counter the opposition. **(Decision Making 4-motivational, 5-program review, 6-problem-solving strategies)**

Concussion management has become a huge issue in athletics. I felt it was very important to include our concussion management plan. I was a key person in helping build our concussion plan. I worked with our trainer, our trainer’s employment agency, and our school’s athletic director. We wanted to make sure all coaches were knowledgeable in diagnosing a possible concussion and the protocol to follow if we think one has occurred. I felt as a coach, we needed to have a certified trainer on site as much as possible to deal with concussions and other injuries. We train our coaches to deal with some injuries and also require our coaches to get trained in concussion management. As a coach, I understand that many things are happening during practice and games and we are liable for all our players. If we can have a trainer on site to take care of injuries when they occur, it allows are coaches to keep their attention on the majority of the players. **(Human Resources 4-supervision, 7-planning and management)** I felt it was important to include these things in our handbook**. (School Law 6-teacher liability, 9-legal issues and processes)** We have also decided this past year to update our training facility and our weight room. We have also posted lots of information for our players to read. It is key that our coaching staff to know that one of our key jobs is to keep our players safe. **(Facilities 2-design and construction, 3-operations and maintenance, 4-health and safety, 9-facility trends)**

Creating this handbook gives administration an opportunity to create a job description for coaches. One of the main responsibilities of the head coach is to be the lead supervisor and assume total responsibility for assistant coaches and the overall program. **(Administration of Curriculum and Instruction 1-supervision, 7-direct assistance)** The handbook also describes compensation for coaches and pay dates. All head coaches and all assistant coaches get paid the same in our district. All Middle School coaches also get paid the same regardless of the sport. The handbook also describes a little about the budgeting process and how activator accounts can be operated. **(Finance 5-role of district, 9-budgeting)** Another responsibility of good coach is to find ways to get involved in the community and allowing the community to get involved in their program. The more support a coach can get from community members and parents the better to a certain extent of course. If people outside the program feel as though they have at least a little ownership, the less chance of them becoming negative about the program. **(School Community Relations 6-building strong public relations, 7-keeping public aware)**

**Supporting Resources**

One of the books I felt very helpful to my coaching handbook project was “What Great Coaches Do Differently”. It was written by Rob Haworth and Todd Whitaker and contains 11 elements of effective coaching. This book creatively relates the values of interscholastic athletic programs and ties those values to education. The book defines the role of the coach and how the coach best serves his or her athletes by teaching the values of participation in sports. The book also demonstrates for all coaches at all levels how to be successful both on and off the field/court of athletic competition. Too many people think coaching is only about the X’s and O’s. While they are important, there is so much more to great coaching and being a great coach. This book helped serve as a guide for me as what a great coach should look like while I created the handbook. The book discussed 11 elements of great coaching and those are as follows:

-Why Look at Great?

-People, Not Programs

-Inside Out

-Coaching 101

-Your Best Athlete

-Expectations

-Playing Time

-Who is the Most Comfortable?

-Planning

-Over-Coaching

-Winning

Each of these elements has several key components that make up each chapter. I may not have quoted things word for word out of this book into my handbook, but I did find a few parts very useful to think about.

One of those parts of the book was the section dealing with parents and playing time. It reminded us about the time and financial investment that parents have in athletics. The author wanted to include that in the book to help us understand why some parents may get frustrated. All people want a return on their investment and when that doesn’t happen to the extent the parent likes, they may get frustrated and look to seek answers. The book tells us to be honest with parents, especially in the pre-season meeting. The worst thing you can do is to make promises to parents and kids before the season begins. You need to give them facts and give them ways to improve. Put the “ball in their court” and allow them to earn more playing time. It is important to remember that each athlete is a very precious thing to their parents and they will fight for their kids. Great coaches inform parents and players of expectations and plans early. They are fair and consistent in their decision making with playing time. Great coaches are also honest to all involved, keeping in mind how precious each child is to their parents.

Another resource that I found very useful to help me create this handbook and to get in the mindset of being an Athletic Director was a pamphlet written and adapted by Bonnie Hutchins. She is a program director for the Wisconsin Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse. The name of the pamphlet is “ Hey! Coach-Winning Ways With Young Athletes”. The booklet covers the concepts of respect, encouragement, support, praise, communication and discipline within the context of coaching. Winning is of course the desired end result, but this booklet properly places a perspective on the need to coach more than the individual player and the game. The book also provides many tips on how to create a positive, winning atmosphere. I thought the section on coping with misbehavior was very helpful in getting me in the correct mindset to create a coaching handbook. There were some pieces that I thought were very important to include as well. The booklet covered some ways to provide proper structure without yelling, threatening, or acting like a drill sergeant.

-Establish clear expectations right away.

-Hold a team meeting to involve your players in deciding reasonable team rules and consequences for breaking them.

-Try to balance structure with a bit of freedom. It is important to remember kids are there to have fun.

-Reinforce and encourage desirable behaviors like teamwork, sportsmanship, cooperation, respect for officials, and support for teammates.

The booklet then went on to give ideas on what to do when there are violations and/or refusal to cooperate.

-Give the player one warning.

-Give your athlete a chance to explain. There may be a good reason for the action.

-Be consistent and impartial, even if it means you have to bench your best player for a game or a part of a game.

-Stay cool and calm. Do not show anger.

-Avoid lecturing or embarrassing the player.

-Stress that the player is paying a penalty because of team rule, not because of the coach or anyone else. The responsibility needs to be put on the player.

-Accept the player as part of the team again once the penalty is over.

The ideas that the book gives for penalties for misbehaving should be something the player values the most. Obvious penalties could be loss of playing time or losing a starting position. Again it is important to follow through no matter who the player is or what game might be coming up next. Some experts do not recommend physical activities for punishment. It is also important to remember that it is okay to sometimes just ignore certain behaviors. Athletes, like all humans, are sometimes just seeking attention. Depending on the severity of the behavior, ignoring it may make it disappear. This pamphlet made me think about what I would really want out of my coaches as far as discipline goes. I would want them to set the expectations early and be clear about them. I would want coaches to be fair, consistent, and use common sense. Coaches do need to “give” a little depending on the circumstances of the individual situation. I would want my coaches to be role models for the appropriate behavior they are seeking. I would want my coaches to be able to give the players tools for changing those unwanted behaviors, teach them to be responsible for their actions, and learn a lesson that will have a positive impact on their future behavior.

The last resources I looked at were actual coaching handbooks from other schools in the Lakeland conference. I thought about other schools that are close to our size and that offered close to the same sports that we offered. Our athletic director received copies of handbooks from Turtle Lake, Shell Lake, Flambeau, and Lake Holcombe. Each handbook was different in format and some procedures, but in general they contained many of the same types of key things. These handbooks really made me think about the importance of certain things. It is important to include the school’s concussion management plan. This is a piece that was probably not even mentioned many years ago, but now seems to be a centerpiece in the world of sports and coaching. Coaches and schools are responsible for their players, so having a concussion management plan created is essential. I also noticed that some of the handbooks were including both the WIAA and school eligibility rules and code violations. I also found that some of the handbooks included elementary, junior high, and high school philosophies. Schools like Clayton are K-12 programs and it is important to have a philosophy at each level for parents and coaches to be aware of. I think that is a piece that needs to be included in the handbook I am creating. I also really liked how some schools had a head coach’s pre-season, in-season, and post-season list of responsibilities. That would seem to make it much easier for a new coach to know what is expected of them and when. I really thought Flambeau’s handbook was effective because it answered several of those questions that might not be thought about or might no want to be asked. They actually used a “question and answer” format for part of their handbook, which I thought was very user-friendly. These 4 resources that were shared with me were very helpful to give me more ideas on what our handbook could look like and should include.

**So What?**

There are so many things that have changed in the world of coaching in the past few years that I have been doing it. It seems to me that it would be much more difficult to walk into a coaching job, especially a head coaching job than it was when I took my first head coaching job eleven years ago. I wanted to create a tool for new coaches to use that would make the transition into coaching in our school much easier. Some things are very difficult to know and some things seem very simple, but cannot be taken for granted. I wanted to give a new coach a document that would answer as many questions as possible, especially those questions that seemed to dumb to ask.

I feel like the handbook I created would help any new coach taking a job at our school. It gives them a pre-season plan, an in-season plan, and a post-season plan. It also shows them where to go to find things and who to talk to. It also answers many of those questions that no one wants to ask, especially new, young coaches. This document also helps the Athletic Director have something they can give to a new coach. It saves the Athletic Director time in trying to cover everything that is involved in coaching. I think it also lends a source of consistency throughout the entire athletic department. Coaches know what to expect from other coaches and parents also know what to expect from the various coaches. I also think it gives the Athletic Director a source to fall back on if something negative ever occurs with a coach.

When I was hired for my first teaching job, I was also hired as a coach. I laugh when I hear that administration is nervous about assigning new teachers with a coaching job. My situation was maybe a bit different than most, but I was hired as an assistant varsity football coach, the junior high girls basketball coach, and the head varsity softball coach. I feel it gave me great insight to become a better time manager because I had various responsibilities. I think it also gave me chance to see other parts of the school, gave me more experiences to deal with parents, and above all it gave me a chance to get to know more student-athletes. Looking back on that first year and even years to follow, I wished I had a coaching handbook to fall back on. It would have been a nice resource to give to my assistants and to use in parent conversations.